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The Impact of the Iraqi Election: A Working Analysis

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Executive Summary

It may be the fall of 2006 before the full impact of the December 15, 2005 election in Iraq is clear. It will be months before the full nature of the new political structure it has created has been negotiated and every element of the new government is in place. There is still some risk that significant numbers of Sunnis will not accept the result, or that some combination of the insurgency and tension between Sunni and Shi'ite may divide the country.

Both Sunni Arab and secular political groups have formed a united front on December 12th. According to Reuters they demanded a rerun of last week's election. They made charges of massive fraud, and threatened to boycott the new parliament and cripple it. The meeting included former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and secular Sunni leader Saleh al-Mutlak, and some 70-80 other politicians from the Iraqi Unified Front, Allawi's Iraqi National List, the Sunni Islamist-led Iraqi Accordance Front and several other groups. They said they had formed committees and would take their complaints not only to the Electoral Commission but also the Arab League, European Union and United Nations.

Nevertheless, the fact Iraq has held a real election for a sovereign government with a legislature with a four-year tenure is an important achievement. In spite of complaints by some of the leading parties, the election seems to have only had a limited number of major glitches, and occurred only limited violence. Sunnis did participate in large numbers, and the overall turn out was relatively high.

Everything depends on whether this success can be turned into a more lasting political process. Voting takes only a matter of minutes, but creating an effective government and functioning political system takes months to begin, and years to complete. The Iraqi election can only be successful if Iraqi politics and governance are successful, and move towards unifying the country and ending support for the insurgency. It may be months before a new government is in place, and it must then come to grips with completing a new constitution and dealing with virtually every major issue that defines the role of government and the new Iraqi state.

Iraq also faces the need to simultaneously expand the role of Iraqi military, special security, and police forces. These are the key to both defeating the insurgents and maintaining national unity. They are critical to the legitimacy of the new government, which must show that its forces can replace most Coalition forces, and that its police can establish local security and a rule of law.

Iraq may or may not succeed. It is far too soon, however, to predict either success or failure. The political and military facts on the ground that emerge during 2006 will determine the outcome. Not the predictions of politicians, analysts, or the media.

Most Iraqis Welcomed the Election

The election was one that most Iraqis welcomed. Iraqis have mixed feelings about the overall pace of events in Iraq. A new ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll

released in the week before the election indicated that some 71% of Iraqis (although largely Shi'ite and Kurd) felt their own lives were going well. Only 44% saw similar progress for the country, but 69% expected situation to get better in the next year. (Only 35% saw a favorable future in Sunni provinces.)

Some 57% still saw security as the country's top priority, although 60% now felt secure in their own neighborhoods, versus 60% in June 2004, and 61% said local security was now good versus 49% in February 2004.

Nevertheless, Iraqis went into the election with considerable optimism. ABC reported that "Three-quarters of Iraqis express confidence in the national elections being held this week, 70 percent approve of the new constitution, and 70 percent — including most people in Sunni and Shiite areas alike — want Iraq to remain a unified country."

The number of Iraqis that preferred democracy as a political system had risen from 49% in February 2004 to 57% in December 2005, while the number preferring an Islamic state had dropped from 21% to 14% and the number calling for a single strong leader for life had dropped from 28% to 26%.

The ABC analysis of "Where Things Stand" in Iraq issued in mid-December noted that,

> "Today, faith in the electoral process runs high (with the exception of the disaffected Sunnis) and confidence in public institutions has risen. This is particularly true for the Iraqi Army — up from 39 percent to 67 percent, and the police — up from 45 percent to 69 percent.
>
> "A smaller majority says they are confident in their local and national leaders — but … basic interest in politics has soared. The percentage of Iraqis reporting such an interest has gone from 39 (November 2003) to 69 today. Asked what sort of government they wish for, 57 percent of Iraqis told us they would prefer a democratic state; 26 percent answered "strong leader"; only 14 percent expressed a preference for an Islamic state.
>
> "… While a slim majority nationwide (51 percent) approve of their local government, sectarian differences are obvious. Iraq's Shiites and Kurds — two populations widely persecuted under Saddam Hussein — are not surprisingly filled with hope and high expectations for the country's current and future political leaders. By large margins, Shiites and Kurds approve of the recently adopted constitution and are confident that the elections will bring positive change. They also give the young Iraqi government generally good marks.

But, Iraqis Voted on Ethnic or Sectarian Lines Without a Clear Agenda for the Future

The full official results of the election will not be certified until mid-January 2006, but it was clear long before the actual voting that this would be an election where most Iraqis would have to vote for the few names they knew at the top of a ticket -- and make a choice between key national, ethnic, and sectarian parties -- without really knowing what a given party ticket or leader really stood for in any detail.

Most Iraqis never saw the candidate lists in full before they went to the polls. The number of candidates also vastly exceeded the number of offices. Not only were most of the

major parties mixes of very different voices and beliefs, but there were 7.655 candidates on 996 candidate lists, 307 political entities (single candidates and political parties), and 19 coalitions. In Baghdad, for example, the ballot paper had 106 candidate lists with 2,161 candidates for 59 seats in the Council of Representatives. There were 212 political contestants on the national ballot.

In spite of this diversity, it was clear that the election had to focus around a few key parties:

> --*United Iraqi Alliance or Unified Iraqi Coalition, #555*: Shi'ite. Led by Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim. This mixed Hakim's Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Moqtada Sadr's group, Al Dawa, and the group led by then Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari.

> --*Iraqi Front for National Dialogue or Hewar National Iraqi Front*: Salih al-Mutlaq heads this list and split the Iraqi Dialogue Council because he opposed the constitution. The list includes five such political groups.

> --*Iraqi Accordance Front or Tawfoq Iraqi Front, #618*: Sunni. Led by Adnan al-Dulaymi and Tariq al-Hashimi. Included three Sunni parties that boycotted the January 30, 2005 election: National Dialogue Council, Iraq Islamic Party (Hashimi), and Iraqi People's Conference. Supported amending constitution, weakening federalism, eliminating Shi'ite and Kurdish dominated Iraq forces, liberalizing admission of former Ba'athists to political process.

> --*Iraqi National List or National Iraqi List, #731*: Shi'ite & Sunni. Led by Iyad Allawi (Prime Minister is previous government.) Includes Independent Democrats Grouping, National Democratic Party, and Communist Party.

> --*Kurdistan Coalition List or Kurdistan Gathering, # 730*: Kurdish. Led by Mas'ud Barzani and Jalal Tababani (then President). Combined the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Smaller Kurdish, Turcoman, and Chaldean Christian elements.

> --*National Congress Coalition, #569*: Largely Shi'ite but some Sunnis. Led by Ahmad Chalabi (then a Deputy Prime Minister. Includes Constitutional Monarchy Movement. Mix of religious and secular voices.

The Full Meaning of the Preliminary Results Remains Uncertain

It was almost inevitable that years of sectarian and ethnic tension and violence would polarize the electorate. It was equally apparent that no election held in mid-insurgency could be perfect, and that tensions were so high that some abuses were inevitable, and there would be charges of corruption and violence – even if some were invalid or exaggerated. Furthermore, since the Sunnis were almost certain to emerge as a minority with far less political power than in the past, and the more secular nationalist were likely to be weak relative to sectarian and ethnic parties, it was likely that they would be the key sources of complaint.

Voting by Governorate, Not Nationwide

This time, however, the vote was by area and not nation-wide, and did allow much better representation by ethnic and sectarian group. Each of Iraq's 18 provinces was considered a separate voting district; the number of parliamentary seats allotted to each district was based on the population of the province. There were 275 seats in the National

Assembly, and 230 were distributed amongst the 18 governorates according to the number of registered voters in each governorate. Baghdad Province, the largest Province, had 59 of the 230 seats in the Council.

The remaining 45 seats out of the 275 were distributed as compensatory seats to political entities whose proportion of the vote received nationally was lower than the number of seats they obtain. . Political entities won seats in a governorate in proportion to the share of votes they receive in the election in that governorate.

The official results will not be out until mid-January, and some 690 formal complaints and thousands of additional complaints had already been made about the way in which the election was conducted by December 20th – with reports of 1,000s of additional complaints in process. There were at least 20 of these 690 complaints that the Iraqi Election commission already regarded as serious. Nevertheless, the preliminary results showed that some 11 million ballots had been cast in all 18 provinces, and reported on a count of some 7 million votes.

The Total Turnout and Voters as a Percentage of Total Registered

The total turnout is shown in the table below. It should be stressed that the count shown is incomplete, but it is still impressive. It also shows that Anbar was the only governorate with a relatively low percentage, and even that was 55%. The others ranged from 62% to 87% and the national average was 70%.

Total Voting Patterns by Province

Governorate	Polling Station	Total Valid Votes	Total Invalid Votes	Total Blanks	Total Votes	Registered	Voters Turnout %
Dhouk	845	394,662	3,325	687	398,674	458,924	86.87%
Erbil	1,491	660,168	7,709	1,817	669,694	870,026	76.97%
Sulaymania	2,066	787,248	7,016	2,677	796,941	961,786	82.86%
Ninewa	2,295	820,350	12,146	5,822	838,318	1,343,381	62.40%
Kirkuk	1,304	514,088	5,919	2,940	522,947	691,581	75.62%
Diyala	1,353	495,522	5,833	3,873	505,228	707,598	71.40%
Anbar	728	369,755	2,662	1,261	373,678	677,821	55.13%
Baghdad	6,888	2,392,543	29,508	23,073	2,445,124	3,857,499	63.39%
Babil	1,497	553,133	8,140	1,227	562,500	747,588	75.24%
Karbala	940	302,834	3,894	550	307,278	439,764	69.87%
Wasit	1,101	346,564	3,395	480	350,439	521,466	67.20%
Salahaddeen	1,073	487,455	6,124	5,339	498,918	564,607	88.37%
Najaf	1,111	368,856	5,175	512	374,543	529,890	70.68%
Qadissiya	1,104	331,302	3,324	571	335,197	524,073	63.96%
Muthana	670	203,902	2,341	520	206,763	315,842	65.46%
Theqar	1,749	576,660	4,403	1,353	582,416	818,939	71.12%
Misan	948	317,177	2,187	265	319,629	441,168	72.45%
Basrah	2,274	794,286	9,813	1,027	805,126	1,096,749	73.41%
Total	**29,437**	**10,716,505**	**122,914**	**53,994**	**10,893,413**	**15,568,702**	**69.97%**

Source: The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, December 21, 2005. Available at: http://www.ieciraq.org/

What was particularly important was that preliminary estimates showed the Sunni vote in a critical Sunni province like Al Anbar went from a total of 2% of the registered voters in January 2005, to 32% in the October referendum over the Constitution and may have exceeded 60% in the December election.

This initial count covered some 89-99% of the vote in 11 out of 18 provinces. The Shi'ite Coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) seemed to dominate the Shi'ite vote, while the Sunni dominated Iraqi Consensus Front (ICF) dominated the Sunni vote. The UIA won 86.9% of the vote in a Shi'ite dominated province like Maysan. As might be expected, the Kurdish coalition party dominated the Kurdish provinces, winning 95.1% of the preliminary count in Erbil (Irbil).

In Baghdad Province, the largest and most mixed province, the UIA won 1.4 million votes, or 59%. The ICF won 14%, and the more secular and nationalist list of Ayad Allawi won 13.7%. The Shi'ite list of Ahmed Chalabi won only about 0.5%. It was not clear from the preliminary results that any one party could win a majority.

Voting by Major Party Grouping by Governorate

A more detailed count is shown in the chart below. It shows just how polarized the vote was by sect and ethnic group by province. At the same time, it is a warning about just how hard it could be to divide much of Iraq by sect and ethnic group without civil war or ethnic cleansing, and the similar difficulties in creating functional federations on the same basis.

Iraqi Election: Uncertified Partial Results – Parties Garnering 5% of Vote or More, by Province

PROVINCE	RELIGION/SECT	VOTES	PERCENT%
Anbar (Total of 9 seats)	Sunni		
Tawafoq Iraqi Front		272707	73.75%
Hewar National Iraqi Front		66322	17.94%
Babil (Total of 11 seats)	Shi'ite, some Sunni		
United Iraqi Coalition		418919	75.74%
National Iraqi List		48593	8.79%
Baghdad (Total of 59 seats)	Shi'ite & Sunni		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		1398778	58.46%
Tawafoq Iraqi Front		454107	18.98%
National Iraqi List		330082	13.80%
Basrah (Total of 16 seats)	Shi'ite, some mixed		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		615255	77.46%
National Iraqi List		87538	11.02%
Diyala (Total of 10 seats)	Kurd, Sunni,		
Tawafoq Iraqi Front	Shi'ite Arab	182223	36.77%
Unified Iraqi Coalition		110285	22.26%
Kurdistani Gathering		66508	13.42%
National Iraqi List		52624	10.62%
Hewar National Iraqi Front		50971	10.29%
Dohuk (Total of 7 seats)	Kurd, some minority		
Kurdistani Gathering		355084	89.97%
Islamic Union of Kurdistan		28957	7.34%
Erbil (Total of 13 seats)	Kurd		
Kurdistani Gathering		628181	95.15%
Karbala (Total of 6 seats)	Shi'ite, some Sunni		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		230211	76.02%
National Iraqi List		35502	11.72%
Tamim/Kirkuk (Total of 9 seats)	Mixed Kurd, Sunni,		
Kurdistani Gathering	Shi'ite, Turcoman,	266737	51.89%
Hewar National Iraqi Front	Minority		14.24%
Iraqi Turkuman Front			11.62%
Tawafoq Iraqi Front			6.17%
Missan/Maysan (Total of 7 seats)			
Unified Iraqi Coalition	Shi'ite	275505	86.86%
Muthana (Total of 5 seats)	Shi'ite, small Sunni		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		176222	86.42%
Najaf (Total of 8 seats)	Shi'ite		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		302573	82.03%
National Iraqi List		28777	7.80%
Ninewa/Nineveh (Total of 19 seats)	Sunni, Kurd,		
Tawafoq Iraqi Front	Shi'ite, some	302518	36.88%
Kurdistani Gathering	minority	157476	19.20%
National Iraqi List		91661	11.17%
Hewar National Iraqi Front		82976	10.11%

Unified Iraqi Coalition		61038	7.44%
Qadisiyyah (Total of 8 seats)	Shi'ite, some Sunni		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		269609	81.38%
National Iraqi List		28296	8.54%
Salahaddin (Total of 8 seats)	Sunni, some Shi'ite		
Tawafoq Iraqi Front		164116	33.67%
Hewar National Iraqi Front		94180	19.32%
National Iraqi List		52116	10.69%
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering		45490	9.33%
Unified Iraqi Coalition		35951	7.38%
Sulaymaniya (Total of 15 seats)	Kurd		
Kurdistani Gathering		685900	87.13%
Islamic Union of Kurdistan		85145	10.82%
Theqar/Dhi Qar (Total of 12 seats)	Shi'ite		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		499582	86.63%
National Iraqi List		29028	5.03%
Wasit (Total of 8 seats)	Shi'ite/Sunni		
Unified Iraqi Coalition		279616	80.68%
National Iraqi List		28053	8.09%

Note: Kurds are mixed, but largely Sunni. Sunni in this table equals Sunni Arab; Shi'ite equals Shi'ite Arab.

Source: Adapted from Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq website, December 20, 2005, available at: http://www.ieciraq.org/English/Frameset_english.htm

Highlighting the Results in Sectarian and Ethnic Terms

Given this background, the preliminary results of the election provided few surprises. While the count is still going on, and the results are discussed in more detail later in this analysis, the following graph shows the results were highly polarized and in ways that provided few signs of corruption or falsifying the results in ways that would have a major impact on the most probable result:

o The Shi'ites dominated the south, and had a majority in nine provinces, with a total of 81 seats, as well as in Baghdad, which has a total of 59 seats.

o The Sunni had a majority in four provinces, which had a total of 46 seats

o The Kurds had a majority in four provinces which had a total of 44 seats

o The secular or nationalist parties did not have a majority in a single province.

At the same time, the graph also shows that the vote was mixed in many governorates, and the dangers of assuming that Iraq can easily be divided into federations, or separated along sectarian and ethnic lines. There also was a significant secular or nationalist voice in many Shi'ite provinces. At least five governorates emerged as so mixed that any division by sect or ethnicity might well trigger ethnic cleansing or civil war, and they had a total of 115 seats – half of those elected by governorate.

Preliminary Results of the Iraq Election by Sect, Ethnicity, or "Nationalism"
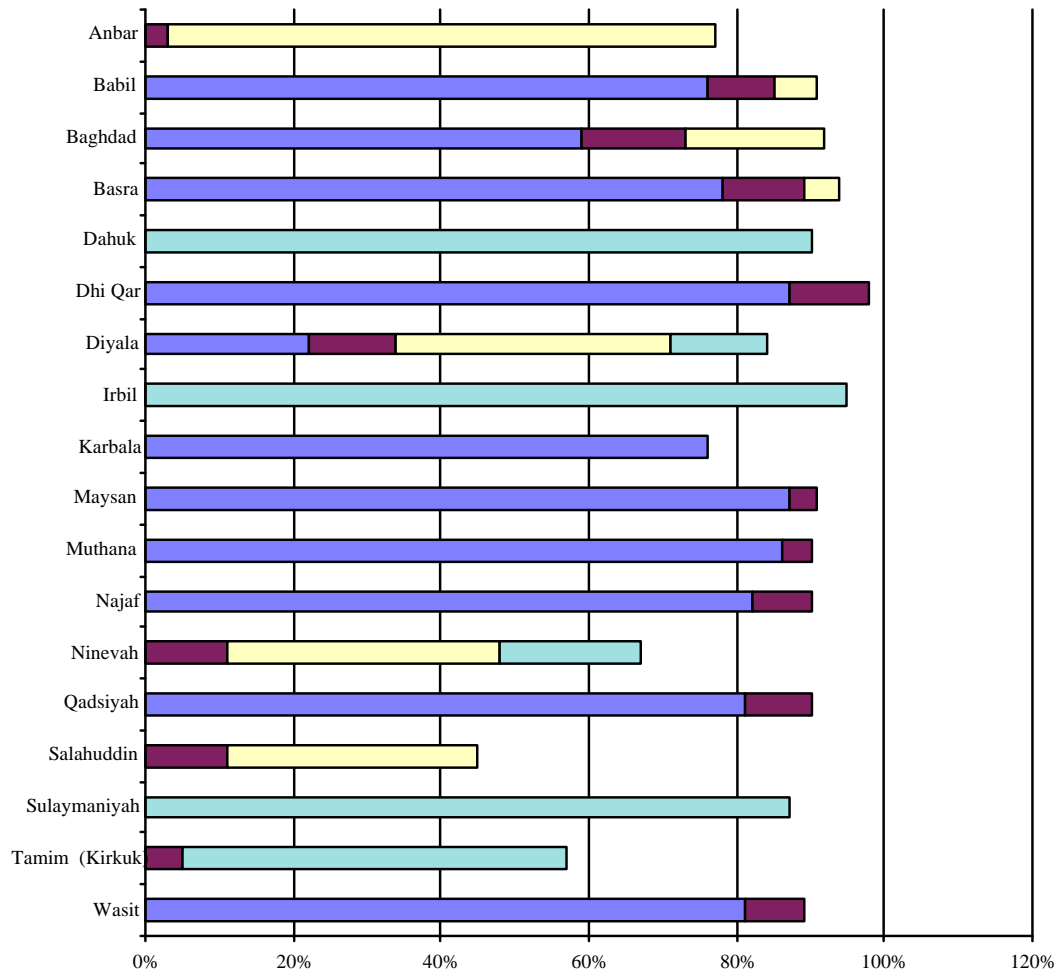
	Wasit	Tamim (Kirk	Sulay mani yah	Salah uddi n	Qads yah	Nine vah	Najaf	Muth ana	Mays an	Karba la	Irbil	Diyal a	Dhi Qar	Dahu k	Basra	Bagh dad	Babil	Anba r
☐ KCL-Kurd		52%	87%			19%					95%	13%		90%				
☐ IAF-Sunni				34%		37%						37%			5%	19%	6%	74%
■ INL & NCC - Nationali	8%	5%		11%	9%	11%	8%	4%	4%			12%	11%		11%	14%	9%	3%
■ UIA-Shi'ite	81%				81%		82%	86%	87%	76%		22%	87%		78%	59%	76%	

Note: Only counts major parties: KCL=Kurdistan Coalition List; INL=Iraqi National List (Ayad Allawi), NCC=National Congress Coalition (Ahmed Chalabi), IAF=Iraqi Accordance Front, UIA=United Iraqi Alliance.
Source: Adapted from the Washington Post, December 21, 2005, p. A23 based on Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq results as of December 20, 2005.

And, the Election is Only a Prelude to Months of Effort in Forming a New Government, Shaping the Nature of Iraqi Politics, and Reaching Critical Decisions Over the Constitution

In any case, it is not just the final voting totals that counts in determining of how political power evolves over the months to come, or exactly which parties get a given number of

representatives in the new national assembly. It is rather how well Iraqis can play "let's make a deal." The election did not resolve any major issue confronting the Iraqi people. It was not a "turning point," but a "trigger." It started a political process that will determine during the course of 2006 whether Iraq has a solid chance of emerging out of its present turmoil with stability, as well as the success or failure of the Coalition in Iraq

The election has created the following schedule for political action:[i]

>--Final voting results expected in first week of January

>--15 days after the final election results are announced, the newly elected Council of Representatives (National Assembly in the old government) meets for the first time. Is supposed to elect a speaker.

>--The Council of Representatives must then negotiate among its members, without a clear deadline, to elect a Presidential Council with a president and two deputy presidents. They must be approved by two-thirds of the Council of Representatives. (This allows a Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurd to share the presidency, but this is not required.)

>--Fifteen days after the Council of Representatives approves the Presidential Council, it is supposed to agree on a prime minister (in practice, chosen by the major parties). The Presidential Council must unanimously approve the choice.

>--No more than 30 days later, the new Prime Minister is to announce his cabinet.

>-- The Council of Representatives must then begin a four-month review of the constitution.

>-- The Council of Representatives must approve any amendments by a majority. (Goes up to two-thirds after four months.)

>-- Two months later, the nation votes on a revised constitution.

During the next six to ten months, those elected must create a new government, transform vaguely defined political parties and coalitions into specific courses of action, allocate power by ethnic or sectarian faction, and come to grips with all of the issues raised by the constitution. If they succeed in creating an inclusive structure in virtually any peaceful form, Iraq succeeds. If they fail, the Coalition fails almost regardless of its military success, and that of the new Iraqi forces, and Iraq will move towards division, paralysis, civil conflict and/or a new strongman.

What the Elections Do and Do Not Show

The elections results do provide important indicators, but most are ambiguous and the election results do not reveal several key aspects of Iraqi politics. They also do not indicate whether Sunnis, and others who object to the results, will actually participate in the new government and/or support a peaceful political process. Furthermore, they strongly indicate that any government that did not act as a national unity coalition, or emphasize unity and inclusion, could trigger serious ethnic cleansing or civil war.

Indicators: Voting in the four most troubled provinces where the insurgency has the most support (Anbar, Salahuddin, Nineveh, and Diyala)

To some extent, the results show the relative strength of the more centrist Sunnis, and more "nationalist" Sunni insurgent movements, versus the strength of the hard-line neo-Salafi religious extremist movements who oppose voting. Voting levels were relatively high, particularly compared to past Sunni participation.

Sunni Voting Did Not Mean Support for the Government and Constitution, or Opposition to Insurgency

It should be noted, however, that some insurgent organizations and many Sunni leaders opposed to federation and the constitution in its current form did call for participation. Voters can remain opponents and insurgents.

> (i) Some Insurgents and pro-insurgents voted simply to create a counterweight to the Shi'ites and Kurds. One can still support violence and vote.

> (ii) Voting pro-Sunni did not mean willingness to accommodate the new government; that will depend on the efforts over the months that follow to define the constitution and the way in which the new government operates.

> (iii) Such voting did not mean support for the US or Coalition. The December 2005 ABC-Time-Oxford Research International poll showed Iraqi Sunnis still decisively reject a US and Coalition role in Iraq. It also reveals they have serious mistrust about the new Iraqi government and armed forces.

Moreover, the ABC analysis of the December 2005 ABC-Time-Oxford Research International poll found that Sunnis saw a steady deterioration in their provinces when they were asked about whether conditions were good.

Are Local Conditions Good? Change in Results from 2004 to 2005
(In Percent, by Province)

Area Polled	All	Shi'ite	**Sunni**	Mixed	Kurdish
Overall conditions of life	+1	+21`	**-26**	+6	-4
Crime Protection	+13	+7	**-22**	+45	+13
Security	+12	+22	**-19**	+29	+14
Jobs	+12	+31	**-12**	+16	+9

Source: ABC News Poll: Where Things Stand, "Poll Finds Broad Optimism in Iraq, But Also Deep Divisions Among Groups," ABC News, December123, 2005.

Only 27% of Sunnis approved the constitution versus 82% for Shi'ites. And, only 37% of Sunnis were confident in the Army versus 87% for Shi'ites. These figures are striking because the poll could not fully sample the Sunni areas were support for the insurgency was strongest.

Sunni attitudes were particularly polarized in Al Anbar, the western province where the insurgency is strongest. Only 1% of those polled felt the US invasion was a good thing, and no respondent placed any faith in US or Coalition forces. Nearly 50% of those polled in Al Anbar called instability their greatest problem. This was more than 17% more than in the other Sunni provinces. Only 13% said their local security situation was good, and only 28% expected it to improve. Only 20% of those polled approved of the new constitution, although 60% did believe the December 15, 2005 elections would produce a more stable government.

Islamist Extremist Opposition

While many mainstream Iraqi Sunnis, and their political and religious leaders advocated participation in the elections and government, and an effort to work with the system -- at least to the point of blocking Shi'ite and Kurdish power and amending the constitution – the more radical Sunni movements strongly opposed such participation and threatened any Sunnis in their areas of influence who voted.

A coalition of five Jihadi Salaphist groups in Iraq (the Qa'ida organization in Iraq; the victorious army; Abu Baker brigades; the Islamic jihad brigade. the brigade of propagation of virtue and prohibition of vice. met and issued the following statement on December 12, 2005:

> "What is going on in Iraq and the conspiracy being weaved against jihad and Mujahideen headed by the crusaders and those who agree with them on what is called the political process. This process is like other previous process, they are the satanic projects which aim to degrade the Mujahideen and the creed.

> "It is swearing to God the new conspiracy of (Dayton) coming back again, those bad people are trying to get us sit to negotiate with them, and with the infidels and with those who violate the credence of our mosques and homes, the honor of our women for the sake of national unity.

"In the mid of all these bad situations that Moslem are going through including the killing and the detaining of the Sunnis, the role played by the apostates trying not to have Islamic state in Iraq formed.

"…They have reached a solution concerning the political process, coming as follows:

· we reject the political process to God and that we are free from any relations with, or those who have ties with the apostate government of what is so called the political process.

· To join the what so called the political process is religiously forbidden, and it contradicts the legitimate policy of God which is the holy Quran.

· To pursue with Jihad, fighting for the word of God, and to establish an Islamic state."

Sunni Insecurity

Given this background, it is not surprising that Sunnis feel more threatened than other Iraqis, although this can be by insurgents and criminals, and not simply by a loss of power or Shi'ite dominated forces and militias. ABC summarized its polling on Sunni attitudes on security versus those of other ethnic and sectarian groups as follows:

"Sixty-one percent of Iraqis now say they feel security is better than it was before the war; that represents a 12 percent increase since we last asked, and a fairly startling counterweight to the prevalent view in the press. Having said that, these numbers are driven almost entirely by Shiites and Kurds who were treated so brutally under Saddam Hussein.

"…By contrast, among Iraq's Sunnis — for whom "security" was almost ironclad under Saddam — a whopping 90 percent report their security is worse today. In 2005, the majority of insurgent attacks have been concentrated in four of Iraq's 18 provinces, which are home to roughly 45 percent of the country's population: Ninevah, Al Anbar, Baghdad and Salah ah Din. Attacks have focused primarily on members of the Iraqi Security Forces, members of the Multinational Forces, Iraqi civilians and government officials — as well as foreign diplomatic and media personnel."

Sunni faith in the Iraqi Army fell by 13% between mid-2004 and the winter of 2005, while Shi'ite faith increased by 22%. In December 2005, Sunnis were 50% less confident in the army than Shi'ites and 23% less confident in the police.

Indicators: Broader Sunni Strength and Attitudes Towards the Government

Many Sunnis almost certainly voted largely to assert a Sunni voice in government as a counterbalance to being excluded, not because they believe that they will be treated fairly, that the political process is working, or that all forms of armed resistance are illegitimate.

The ABC analysis of the December 2005 ABC-Time-Oxford Research International polling results found that Iraqi Arab Sunnis had very different attitudes from Arab Shi'ites. Only 43% of Sunnis described life as good versus 86% for Shi'ites. Only 9% of Sunnis felt things in Iraq were going well versus 53% for Shi'ites. Only 7% of Sunnis felt the US had a right to invade versus 59% for Shi'ites. Only 11% of Sunnis said they felt "very safe" versus 80% for Shi'ites.[ii]

Sunni attitudes were generally far less favorable towards the government and the elections than Shi'ites and Kurds. The poll found that, "The contrast among Sunnis is stark: Only 27 percent approve of the constitution; 48 percent say they are confident regarding the elections; and only 12 percent believe the government has done a good job." It also found that Sunni confidence in the elections was just 48% versus 80% elsewhere.

When Sunnis were asked their current preference for a type of government, only 38% favored democracy versus 57% for all Iraqis, 75% in mixed areas like Baghdad, 63% in Kurdish areas, and 45% in Shi'ite areas. As the table below shows, the poll found that Sunnis had a more favorable attitude towards democracy when they looked five years into the future. It also found, however, that Sunnis were still much more likely to prefer a strong leader for life over democracy than other Iraqis.

It also seems likely that those Sunnis who favored democracy sometimes did so more because they opposed an Islamic state they felt would be dominated by Shi'ites than because of any basic faith in democracy. Some 88% in Sunni governorates also favor a unified Iraq versus only 56% in Shi'ite provinces, but this again seems likely to reflect a fear of the loss of oil wealth, power, and isolation as well as a deep belief in national unity.

Preferred System of Government: Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurd
(In Percent, by Province)

What Iraq Needs in Five Years	All	Shi'ite	Sunni	Mixed	Kurdish
Democracy	64%	59%	55%	74%	61%
Islamic State	12%	24%	4%	8%	14%
Stronger Leader	18%	11%	34%	11%	17%

Source: ABC News Poll: Where Things Stand, "Poll Finds Broad Optimism in Iraq, But Also Deep Divisions Among Groups," ABC News, December123, 2005.

Sunni Political Parties

The election results to date do not indicate that Sunnis were deprived of large numbers of votes, and the Sunni parties should get roughly the same number of seats as the Kurds. It seems unlikely that the Shi'ites and Kurds can get the 184 seats they would need to have the two-thirds majority they need to form a new government, or would ignore the Sunnis in any case. Nevertheless, the initial Sunni reaction has been to dispute the election results, make a host of charges (some 700 complaints by late December 21, 2005), and call for new elections.

It is far from clear how serious these calls are, but the previous issues and attitudes explain why the Sunnis are hostile to Shi'ite and Kurdish control and how sensitive the political situation is. There is a serious risk of division or paralysis in the process of political inclusion, although political negotiations are obviously underway, and compromise may well be possible.

If the Sunnis parties do chose to participate in the new government, the fact remains that they are divided and unproven, and have leaders and candidates whose behavior may be very different when it comes to forming a coalition, serving in the legislature, or taking office.

The key Sunni parties now include the:

- **Iraqi Accord(ance) Front, Iraqi Consensus Front, or Tawafoq Iraqi Front**: This list led by Adnan al-Dulaymi has three predominantly Sunni parties and largely supports the constitution:

    - General Conference of the People of Iraq (GCPI), led by Adnan al-Dulaymi
    - Iraqi Islamic Party, led by Tariq al-Hashimi
    - National Dialogue Council led by Khalaf al-Ulayyan.

- **Iraqi Front for National Dialogue or Hewar National Iraqi Front:** Salih al-Mutlaq heads this list and split the Iraqi Dialogue Council because he opposed the constitution. The list includes the following political groups:

    - Christian Democratic Party led by Minas al-Yusufi
    - Arab Democratic Front led by Fahran al-Sudayd
    - National Front for a Free and United Iraq led by Hasan Zaydan
    - United Sons of Iraq Movement led by Ali al-Suhayri.
    - Iraqi National Front

The fact the Iraqi Islamic Party supported the constitutional referendum divided key elements of the nascent Sunni political structure long before the election. Adnan al-Dulaymi's General Conference of the People of Iraq and the NDC agreed to merge with the Islamic Party to form the Iraqi Accord Front, Al-Mutlaq split with the National Dialogue Council (NDC) and some smaller parties under the name the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue. The Association of Muslim Scholars refused to participate on the grounds that multinational forces should first announce a timetable for withdrawal.

The preliminary results show that there are many mixed sectarian and ethnic areas in Iraq. The voting for Iraqi Accord(ance) Front or Tawafoq Iraqi Front seems to have gotten some 19% of the total national vote to date. This was particularly important since the key party in this group was one of the few Sunni partiers to openly endorse the constitution while the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue or Hewar National Iraqi Front was more hostile to it.

If one compares these two parties by governorate, the results were mixed. The Iraqi Accord(ance) Front or Tawafoq Iraqi Front got 74% of the preliminary vote in Anbar, 19% in Baghdad, 37% in Diyala, 6% in Kirkuk, 37% in Nineveh, and 34% in Salahiddin, The Iraqi Front for National Dialogue or Hewar National Iraqi Front got 18% of the preliminary vote in Anbar, 10% in Diyala, 14% in Kirkuk, 10% in Nineveh, and 19% in Salahiddin,

Indicators: Nationalist versus Sectarian and Ethnic Parties

The preliminary results show that Iyad Allawi and the *Iraqi National List or National Iraqi List, #731* got a relatively limited level of support: 9% in Babil, 14% in Baghdad, 11% in Dyala, 12% in Karbala, 8% in Najaf, 11% in Nineveh, 9% in Qadisyyah, 11% in Salahaddin, 5% in Theqar and 8% in Wasit. This is not a bad result in national terms,

but scarcely the kind that makes the party the key power broker some of its leaders hoped.

The end result is that the party has made complaints about the electoral process similar to the Sunnis. Many of the expectations this group might do well, however, were based on the attitudes of elites in the Baghdad area, and not on the realities of a divided Iraq. The results were also tainted by personal attacks on Allawi. The campaign led to an increasingly bitter set of exchanges between Allawi and leading Shi'ite politicians in the UIA, and even to threats by the Badr Organization to overthrow any Allawi government that emerged out of the election. Allawi had received money from the CIA during his opposition to Saddam Hussein, and he was attacked during the campaign m as a tool of the US.

As has been touched upon earlier, many Iraqis saw a need to vote an ethnic or sectarian ticket in this election even though the new ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll did not show strong support for religious government. ABC reported that, "Preference for a democratic political structure has advanced, to 57 percent of Iraqis, while support for an Islamic state has lost ground, to 14 percent (the rest, 26 percent, chiefly in Sunni Arab areas, favor a "single strong leader.")"

The so-called nationalist parties were also as diverse a mix as the Sunni and Shi'ite parties. Allawi's National Iraqi List included the:

   --Independent Democrats Grouping, led by Dr Adnan al-Pachachi

   --Iraqi Communist Party, led by Hamid Majid Musa

   --National Accord Movement, led by Iyad Allawi

   --Iraqiyun (Iraqis), led by Ghazi al-Yawar

   --Iraqi Republican Grouping led by Sa'd al-Janabi

   --Arab Socialist Movement

   --Qasimi Democratic Grouping led by Qasim al-Janabi

   --Society of Iraqi Turkoman Tribes

   --Loyalty to Iraq Grouping, led by Shaykh Husayn al-Sha'lan

   --Independent Tribal Leaders of Iraq Council led by Ali al-Azzawi

   --Islamic Democratic Current, led by Izzat al-Shabandar

Indicators: Voting in the Kurdish Areas

These results provided a strong indication of Kurdish strength, and the two main Kurdish political parties in the ruling Coalition of Barzani and Talibani -- the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – seem likely to emerge with around 20 percent of the vote. They also succeed in dominating the Kurdish vote in the election and keeping smaller parties like Islamic Union from winning a meaningful number of seats.

The voting did not reveal how many Kurds still want independence, the level of tension in the Kurdish dominated areas over issues like oil and Kirkuk, the level of tension between the Barzani and Talibani factions, or the level of tension with other ethnic groups like the Turcomans.

Accordingly, the results do not serve as a prediction of how the Kurds will behave, and be treated, in the very different government to emerge after the elections. Even before the election, Jalal Talibani said the presidency would be a hollow part of the new government structure. Arab Shi'ites may become more interested in compromise with Arab Sunnis than with the Kurds.

The flow of money that has previous kept the KDP and PUK unified to the extent there have only been minor armed clashes is also uncertain. The Kurds face serious revenue issues as oil for food and aid phase down. They already lost most of their revenue from smuggling shortly after Saddam fell when the CPA virtually abolished most Iraqi tariffs.

Non-Indicators: Shi'ite Intentions and Unity

The vote for the Shi'ite coalition ticket showed that the UIA was clearly the dominant party and it seems likely that it could get some 120 or more seats. Ahmed Chalabi did not succeed in capturing a large part of the Shi'ite vote or convincing other groups he stood for an effective secular or national program. His new party only captured a token vote in most areas.

At the same time, the results did not provide a picture of how flexible or inclusive the main Shi'ite parties will be, or how the Shi'ite parties will behave after the Coalition.
The present Prime Minister, Ibrahim Jafari, is seen as both popular and weak, but no clear alternative has as yet emerged. Many feel that Deputy President Adel Abdul Mahdi has emerged as a strong potential leader, but much depends on how the election results for the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) are translated into actual decisions about its leadership and how it will behave..

The Mix of Shi'ite Parties

As has been discussed earlier, national polls before the election showed less support for a religious type of government, and local reporting shows some dissatisfaction with local religious governments. However, hard-line Shi'ite factions control Basra and a significant part of Baghdad, and even if the national leaders have cohesive positions, it is not clear how well they will speak for local government and politics in the Shi'ite dominated provinces.

The key largely Shi'ite coalitions include the following parties:

   United Iraqi Alliance: Led by Abd-al-Aziz al-Hakim. The UIA has some 18 member parties, and includes the following political groups:
      --Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), led by Al-Sayyid Abd-al-Aziz al-Hakim.
      --Al-Sadr Bloc
      --Islamic Da'wah Party - General Headquarters
      --Islamic Da'wah Party - Iraq Organization
      --Al-Fadilah (virtue) Party
      --Centre Grouping Party

--Badr Organization
--Al-Adalah (justice) Group
--Hezbollah Movement of Iraq
--Sayyid al-Shuhada (master of martyrs) Movement
--Iraqi Turkomans Loyalty Movement
--Islamic Union of the Iraqi Turkomans
--Justice and Equality Grouping
--Iraqi Democrats

National Congress Coalition: Led by Ahmad al-Chalabi and combining his Iraqi National Congress and the Constitutional Monarchy Movement headed by Al-Sharif Ali Bin-al-Husayn. The Coalition includes the:
--Iraqi National Congress
--Iraqi Constitutional Party
--Iraqi Constitutional Movement
--Turkoman Decision Party
--Democratic Iraq Grouping
--First Democratic National Party
--Democratic Joint Action Front

The Uncertain Future of the UIA

The previous tables and graphs have shown that the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) is clearly the key Shi'ite party and will probably remain an umbrella coalition of Shi'ite parties after the election. Its status, however, is much more uncertain than in the January 2005 election. The key parties still in the UIA are the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Islamic Al-Da'wah or Dawa Party; members of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's movement, and these parties have many internal tensions. For example, one Sadr supporter, Fattah al-Shaykh, seems to have dropped out because of Sadr failure to adopt a decisive stand "on participation in the elections." A number of former UIA participants have left to form or join other parties and coalitions.

Key UIA leaders like the Moqtada Al-Sadr and Abdul Aziz Al Hakim differ sharply over critical issues like federation. Sadr strongly opposes it, and Hakim strongly favors it. Sadr is always an explosive political uncertainty, and has reasserted himself as a major political voice in Baghdad, Basra, and elsewhere as well as a major anti-US voice. Hakim's post election political role could be particularly critical because he is the leader of the Shi'ite Islamist Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and plays a major role in the actions of the Badr Organization, which is blamed for many of the Shi'ite attacks on Sunnis. He also has ties to the present Minister of the Interior, who is blamed for tolerating some of the abuses by government prisons and the special security units.

Chalabi's Role

Ahmad al-Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress and the Constitutional Monarchy Movement were part of the UIA in the last election but left to form the National Congress Coalition It is too soon to count put the ever-ambiguous Ahmad Chalabi, but he did not do well in any area in Iraq.

The Unelected Voice: The Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani

Another uncertainty is the future role of the most important unelected figure in Iraq, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. Sistani's role may be particularly critical in deciding how seriously Shi'ites pursue separatism under the guise of federation, versus inclusive politics and national unity.

Non-Indicators: Support for the US and Coalition

The mid-December ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll provides a strong warning that voting will not mean an endorsement of the US and Coalition, regardless of what faction Iraqis vote for.

Calling for the US to Leave

ABC summarizes the poll results as follows:

> "…half of Iraqis now say it was wrong for U.S.-led forces to invade in spring 2003, up from 39 percent in 2004.

> "The number of Iraqis who say things are going well in their country overall is just 44 percent, far fewer than the 71 percent who say their own lives are going well. Fifty-two percent instead say the country is doing badly.

> "There's other evidence of the United States' increasing unpopularity: Two-thirds now oppose the presence of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, 14 points higher than in February 2004. Nearly six in 10 disapprove of how the United States has operated in Iraq since the war, and most of them disapprove strongly. And nearly half of Iraqis would like to see U.S. forces leave soon.

> "Specifically, 26 percent of Iraqis say U.S. and other Coalition forces should "leave now" and another 19 percent say they should go after the government chosen in this week's election takes office; that adds to 45 percent. Roughly the other half says coalition forces should remain until security is restored (31 percent), until Iraqi security forces can operate independently (16 percent), or longer (5 percent)."

Fear of the US as a Security Threat

One key aspect of Iraqi attitudes is security. A total of 37% said that a lack of security, chaos, civil war, internal trouble, or division of the country was the worst thing that could happen to Iraq in the next year. An additional 12% cited terrorism. The third ranking fear – some 9% of Iraqis polled -- said that the worst thing would be for Coalition forces *not* to leave the country.

A total of 49% of all Iraqis polled still said they felt unsafe, and cited terrorism as the main reason. However, when they were asked what they did to feel more safe, 67% said they avoided US forces, 52% said they avoided checkpoints, 47% said they avoided the police and government buildings, and 43% said they were careful about what they said.

Another ABC report on the situation in Iraq in mid-December noted that,

> "Iraqis who do not feel safe tell us they take a variety of measures to protect themselves. Sixty-seven percent say they avoid U.S. forces; one in two stays clear of checkpoints if possible; and 43

percent are careful about what they say in public. Again, these are figures for Iraqis who say they feel less safe than before.

"The impact of security shortfalls remains significant. Violence has hampered reconstruction, in western and central Iraq in particular, and it has meant that badly needed funds for electricity, clean water, education and salaries for health care professionals are spent instead on security. In one stunning measure of "Where Things Stand" in Iraq we found that as of October 2005, approximately $5 billion of the $18.4 billion appropriated by the U.S. Congress for reconstruction in Iraq had been diverted to security needs.

"Many parents have become more afraid to allow their children, girls in particular, to attend school, and some Iraqis are too frightened even to visit the doctor when sick.

"… a strange calm pervades some cities where local militias have seized power. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Karbala, a major city in southern Iraq where such militia appear to have infiltrated the police and security forces. It's a development that outsiders, and some locals, view with fear and dismay — how, after all, can the true authorities hold power and garner respect when bands of armed men outside the government set up checkpoints and rule the streets? Yet many locals — in Karbala at least — report that these militias have improved security. An "iron hand" may be at work, and it may be a fleeting calm, but for the moment it is noticed and appreciated."

A recent Zogby poll also shows these results go far beyond Iraq. The poll found that 84% of Egyptians polled said their attitudes towards the US have grown worse over the last year, 62% of Jordanian, 49% of Lebanese, 72% of Moroccans, 82% of Saudis, and 58% of those in the UAE. These results tracked in many ways with polling done by the Pew Trust, and it is interesting to note the causes. When Zogby asked what the most important factor in determining Arab attitudes towards the US were, he got the following results:

Most Important Factor in Determining Attitude Towards US in 2005

Factor	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Saudi Arabia	UAE
War in Iraq	57	48	34	45	49	31
President Bush's Promotion of Democracy and Reform	4	6	16	2	9	9
Developments in Arab-Israeli Front	8	13	119	8	8	7
American Treatment of Arabs And Muslims	28	28	22	40	32	41
Other	0	3	4	2	0	5

Source: Zogby International, Attitudes of Arabs: 2005, December 7, 2005, p. 14.

Lack of Support and Gratitude for the US Aid Effort

There is also negligible support or gratitude for the US aid effort: Only 18% percent of the Iraqis polled described the post war construction efforts in their area as "very effective." At total of 52% said they were ineffective or had never occurred at all. Only

6% saw the US as playing a main role in the reconstruction process and only 12% gave credit to the government.

In spite of such attitudes, it should be stressed that the US did make a major contribution to making the election work. The ambassador, embassy team, and senior US officials and commanders pushed hard for the kind of inclusiveness that could keep Iraqi united and give it political hope. US and Coalition forces will provide the most critical aspects of security although this time there will be more Iraqi officials in the field than Coalition forces.

The US Embassy reported the following aid efforts:

--Helped to prepare a comprehensive plan and cost estimate for voter registration for election events in 2004 and 2005, which the Iraqi government used to establish the election plan.

--Helped to establish the IECI in time to carry out the January 2005 elections.

--Embedded 14 technical experts within the IECI who worked in full partnership with the UN.

--Provided technical expertise, which led to the establishment of the electoral legal framework that defines Iraq's electoral systems.

--Collaborated with the Iraqi election commissioners to ensure the delivery of public information and commodities, including voting registration kits, printing and shipment of voter registry, and voter education information.

--Implemented a comprehensive, countrywide voter education campaign that targeted Sunni Arabs, women and other minorities.

--Trained 15,000 political party agent observers who were mobilized for the January 2005 Election. USAID also trained and deployed approximately 10,000 accredited domestic monitors throughout Iraq for both the January and October 2005 votes.

--To educate the populace about the content and significance of the constitution, USAID produced and distributed 1.35 million pamphlets and supplements on the constitution in both Arabic and Kurdish; broadcasted Town Hall meetings with members of the Constitutional drafting committee on television, and produced and distributed constitutional posters.

--Conducted 5,000 constitutional workshops reaching over 200,000 people throughout Iraq including women and Sunnis. USAID conducted 861 workshops in Sunni Arab areas alone.

--Women's rights and minority rights were also supported. USAID provided a $500,000 grant to a coalition of more than 30 women's organizations to advocate for women's rights in a constitutional democracy. A USAID $10,000 grant went to a minority rights organization that successfully lobbied for the inclusion of minority rights in the constitution.

--Established the Iraq without Violence network of NGOs to monitor violence and mitigate conflict related to the elections.

Non-Indicators: Support for the Current Government

The voting did not show how many Iraqis voted primarily because they feared other ethnic and sectarian groups and are seeking to strengthen their own. It certainly did not reflect faith in the government elected in January. Many Shi'ites saw Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari as weak and ineffective – some for being too Shi'ite and some for not-being Shi'ite enough. This is of more than passing importance because Jafari remains the leader of both Al Dawa (a key Shi'ite political faction) and the Shi'ite coalition – the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA).

The Importance of Security

Once again, the ABC-Time Oxford Research International poll provided useful results. ABC reported that,

> "Surprisingly, given the insurgents' attacks on Iraqi civilians, more than six in 10 Iraqis feel very safe in their own neighborhoods, up sharply from just 40 percent in a poll in June 2004. And 61 percent say local security is good — up from 49 percent in the first ABC News poll in Iraq in February 2004.

> "Nonetheless, nationally, security is seen as the most pressing problem by far; 57 percent identify it as the country's top priority. Economic improvements are helping the public mood. Other views, moreover, are more negative: Fewer than half, 46 percent, say the country is better off now than it was before the war…The number of Iraqis who say things are going well in their country overall is just 44 percent, far fewer than the 71 percent who say their own lives are going well. Fifty-two percent instead say the country is doing badly."

As the previous discussion of other polling results has show, these comments need to be put in context. They do not break out the results by province or ethnic/sectarian group. The Shi'ites and Kurds living in the relatively safe provinces have every reason to be far more optimistic about security and life than other Iraqis. Nation-wide results disguise more than they reveal in describing an insurgency that is driven by a Sunni minority that cannot be more than 20% of the total population and which is scarcely united around the insurgents.

Sunni versus Shi'ite Differences

As the ABC report on "Where Things Stand Indicates,"

> "Virtually all signs of optimism vanish when one is interviewing Iraq's Sunni Muslims. There's more on this in the Local Government section of the report; suffice for now to cite a pair of poll results. While 54 percent of Shia Muslims believe the country is in better shape than it was before the war, only 7 percent of Sunnis believe the same. Optimism about security — 80 percent of Shias and 94 percent of Kurds say they feel safer — is absent among Sunnis. Only 11 percent of Iraq's Sunni Muslims say they feel safer than they did under Saddam.

> "Overall, there is a Rorschach-test quality to all this. One could easily sift through the research and field reporting and conclude that Iraq is in danger of collapse; one could almost as easily glean from the same data that there is great cause for optimism.

> "At the heart of the "collapse" scenario is a litany of dashed hopes. Many Iraqis cannot understand why — two-and-a-half years after the Americans arrived — electricity and sewage are not more reliable, why more reconstruction projects have not reached their neighborhoods, why corruption remains so prevalent and why their local (and in many cases democratically elected) officials have not changed things for the better.

> "Yet there are ample reasons for optimism: The burgeoning commerce that now touches nearly all corners of the country; an economy growing, thanks in part to the high price of oil; per-capita income up 60 percent, to $263 per month; improvements in health care and education; and the widely held belief that next week's elections will make a positive difference. Seventy-six percent of Iraqis told us they were "confident" the elections would produce a "stable government" — and despite the sectarian divisions, few Iraqis express concern about civil war."

A Real-World Economic Crisis, Not Progress

Ironically, this latter statement illustrates the dilemmas and contradictions in any reporting on Iraq and Iraqi attitudes. The rise is per capita income is a national average based on dividing the total population into the total GNP measured in ppp terms. It is driven as much by a flood of wartime income and aid as oil revenue, and the distribution is unquestionably far less equitable than at the time of Saddam Hussein.

As ABC reported in its mid December poll,

> "Unemployment overall is difficult to gauge. There is a growing 'informal economy,' and many Iraqis have taken second jobs. A U.N. survey published in May 2005 put unemployment at 18.4 percent; this is almost certainly a low-end figure…nationwide unemployment currently hovers between 27 percent and 40 percent.

> "…The work rolls remain decimated because of the purging of the old army and much of the old Ba'athist apparatus. Whatever the political benefits or costs of that much-debated policy, there is no question that it put a great many Iraqi men out of work. Further, the Iraqi government no longer finds it practical or feasible to employ the sprawling work force that existed during the rule of Saddam Hussein."

What Comes After the Elections

Both Iraqi and US officials caution that it may take up to several months after the results to agree on a new government. Even if the period is much shorter, simply dividing up titles in the executive, legislature, and government will not necessarily indicate who actually has power or the capability to use it.

Post-Election Coalitions will be More Important than the Election Results

The coalitions of Sunni, Shi'ite, Kurdish, and nationalist factions that emerges during this process may tell far more about the future than actual voting strength or numbers of legislators. Even then, however, coalitions may shift from issue to issue, and may take on a very different form once the government is actually formed and begins to operate.

One key issue will be how close the UIA and Kurds can come to winning a simple majority – a key issue in the election. If not, the diverse coalitions described earlier must find some way to agree on a national unity government. The choice of a Presidency Council, Prime Minister, and of the key Ministers – Defense, Interior, Oil and Finance – may well do more to define power in practice than the elections. So, however, may the kind of legislative alliances that define how the Constitution is completed, amended and interpreted.

Critical areas for political decision-making and the choice of leaders will be:

> (i) The requirement that two-thirds of the newly elected national assembly has to agree on the "Presidential council" and the president and two vice presidents who must nominate a prime minister for approval by the assembly. This not only adds a major new political issue to selection of a prime minister, it raises real issues about the real world aftermath. The presidential council seems weak on paper, but could bargain and in any case will be much stronger if the prime minister is not strong and his coalition is weak.

> (ii) Whether the Ministry of Defense continues under Sunni leadership, and to emphasize a truly national army and one that is sensitive to Sunni concerns.

> (iii) Whether the Ministry of Interior is brought under control, moves away from its recent tendency to tolerate or carry out Shi'ite revanchism, and becomes effective in creating truly national special security and police forces.

> (iv) Whether the Oil Ministry has professional leadership and moves forward decisively to renovate oil and gas facilities, and carry out exploration and development of a kind that will ease the tension between factions. There have so far been far too many studies, and far too few tangible actions and results.

> (v) Whether the Ministry of Finance gets leadership that can actually manage resources and the budget, bring overspending in other ministries under control, and deal with the necessary compromises over how to handle oil and other state revenues and taxation.

Power versus Voting Results and Law(yers)

The period following the election is much more likely to be an exercise in political power than one in law – particularly because it is politicians who will decide the way that efforts to change the constitution are implemented.

If power is exercised in a moderate and inclusive way, Iraq may well move forward as a unified state. If power becomes polarized, or is used at the expense of Sunnis or "nationalists," the result can be paralysis, division, or civil war.

Post-Election Timing and Political Dynamics: Politics versus Force

The political dynamics are also demanding. The debate over the constitutional referendum, and the constitution, opened up virtually every key issue in Iraqi politics, and created a process where the constitution needs to be completed and can only be amended by simple majority for a relatively short time. The new government will also inherit a budget deficit, the need to take over management of more of the aid process, and immediate issues over the control of oil revenues.

More importantly, it will inherit an ongoing insurgency and a climate where suicide attacks on Shi'ites and Kurds have been increasingly mixed with Shi'ite military and Special Iraqi Security forces attacks on Sunnis. Even if some or many of the more "moderate" or nationalist Sunni insurgents do come over to the government side, the more extreme and Islamist insurgents face the fact that this is a critical time window in which they must do everything possible to provoke the Shi'ites and Kurds, prevent compromise, and move towards a civil war or at least paralysis and disintegration of the political process.

This also, however, is the time when Shi'ites who want federalism or to dominate Iraq must act politically or through their own efforts at violence, and Kurds who want nationhood must act.

The good news is that many more Iraqi forces will come on line at the same time, and that a successful political process will probably be supported by a successful military and police effort. The two do, however, go in tandem, and a failed or non-inclusive political process could divide the Iraqi armed forces or polarize them against the Sunnis.

Key Post-Election Issues

One needs to be very careful about assuming Iraq's new government must solve every issue at once, or that it must find all such answers soon after the new government is formed. Compromise, delay, and deferral are excellent political solutions; so are half-measures and cosmetic actions. Governments muddle through because political realities force them to, and because "muddling" is far more stable and uniting than acting with clarity and efficiency.

Nevertheless, anyone attempting to interpret the election results must be aware just how many critical issues the last few years, and the debate over the constitution, have unleashed. The new government must deal directly or indirectly with the following practical issues – none of which have been addressed with meaningful clarity by the political parties running in the election.

Finishing and Amending the Constitution

Finessing the constitution left many areas unfinished or ambiguous (some 35-50 laws have to be passed to complete it) and pushed most of the controversial issues off on the new government. This government will have many members of the new assembly – particularly Sunni -- who ran on tickets calling for amendments to the constitution and sometimes opposing it. The government also faces pressure to act during the four-month period where the national assembly can amend it by a simple majority.

The assembly will probably have to agree on a general and inclusive document at this time in order to present all of its amendments in a single referendum, but – as the discussion below details -- many issues affecting the constitution affect the most controversial political issues affecting Iraq and the new government. There may well be more passion than reason.

There also seems to be some debate over the conditions for amending the constitution. Dr, Jonathan Morrow of the USIP notes that the final amendments to the constitution before the October 15th referendum called for the following process:

> --First: The House of Representatives shall form at the beginning of its work a committee from its member to represent the key components of the Iraqi society. The mission of the committee is to present a report within four months including the recommendations of the necessary amendments to the constitution. The committee will be dissolved after presents its suggestion.

> --Second: The amendments will be submitted to the Council of Representative for voting and it considered approved if it obtains the majority of the votes.

> --Third: The amended articles approved by the Council of Representative (as indicated in item 2 above) will be presented to the people for vote in a public referendum within two months form the date of the approval of the amendments by the Council of Representatives.

> --Fourth: The amendment will be agreed upon if it obtains the majority of votes and not rejected by two thirds of voters in 3 Governorates.

> --Fifth: Suspension of Article 122 (related to the amendment of the constitution) .The article will return to effect after the changes are made.

Some reporting still says the Assembly needs a two-thirds majority to pass amendments, while some senior Iraqi politicians have talked as if the assembly vote alone would be enough. Morrow seems to be correct, however, in noting that any package of amendments would be subject to the same terms as the October 15th referendum, and that, "it will be equally difficult for any one political grouping to impose their will on the constitutional text as was last summer (though the Kurdish and Shia parties will no doubt be informed by the knowledge a Sunni Arab vote would probably not be able to defeat a joint proposed amendment from their camps."

The Political Struggle for Sunni Inclusion

The election can only be a prelude to a much more intense effort to include Sunnis in the political process, convince them that participation is more rewarding than violence and insurrection, and find compromises over revenues, power, control of the Iraqi forces, and other issues.

Sunni politics will also have to evolve. The current parties are more self-selected than legitimate, and there is little unity over issues like the role of religion in the state, the definition of nationalism, how Sunni rights can and should be preserved, etc. The fact Sunni parties lag more than two years behind Shi'ite and Kurdish parties will be a serious issue.

The Kurdish Question

The Kurds will have to define their role in a new Iraq where they do not get preferential financing, oil for food money, or major smuggling revenues. They need to define both their own level of unity and how they will really relate to the rest of Iraq. Issues like control of oil revenues and divided ethnic areas like Kirkuk are already time sensitive. So is the political role Kurds will play at the national level in the new government.

The Problem of Federalism

The Iraqi constitution leaves the definition and practice of federalism so ambiguous that it can border on confederation, autonomy, or separatism. Some form of near-autonomy is vital in resolving the Kurdish question but could tear the Arab portion of the country apart, trigger sectarian separatism and soft ethnic cleansing, and create impossible problems in terms of revenues, oil, control of the Iraqi forces, etc.

The acid test may be the choices Shi'ites make for nationalism over federalism.

National, governorate, and local power

At a different level, the constitution and political processes to date combine to leave major uncertainties overt the de facto power of the central government to control given governorates and particularly over the level of independence of local authorities in cities like Baghdad and Basra. These are key practical day-to-day issues of governance versus ethnic and sectarian divisions and federalism, but all interact and affect critical issues like money, power, religion, and control of security forces.

At the same time, the new legislature must come to grips with allocating senior positions at the national level, and defining the relative strength of the prime minister, presidency,

ministers, etc. Defining the practical allocation of power at the top often has little to do with electoral results or party leadership. Iraq will have to find its own approach to doing this under a new political system and constitution.

Control of the Military, Security Forces, and Police and Shaping the Role of the Militias

The Coalition has brought Iraqi forces to the point where they should allow significant reductions of Coalition forces in 2006, and Iraqi forces to take over most visible security missions on the ground. If the process is well managed and sustained, it can be a prelude to the withdrawal of all Coalition forces over time, although an advisory role and some enabling and support forces may be necessary through 2010.

Everything will depend, however, on the political dimension, and the effort to bring unity and inclusion. It will depend on creating truly national military and special security forces, and police who are both effective and serve the cause of unity and human rights – not simply local authority.

Control over (Sharing of) Oil

Oil is the practical symbol of wealth and power. Control over oil revenues is control over some 85% of state earnings, and control over the exploration and development of new and existing oil reserves is already a critical political issue. The constitution leaves this issue ambiguous; political pressure will almost certainly force the issue over the first six months the new government is in session.

These near-term problems are further complicated by pipeline and export route politics; the integration of important aspects of the oil and gas infrastructure on a national level; the lack of refinery capacity and gross overdependence on product imports; and unsustainable subsidized prices for gasoline, cooking fuel, heating oil, etc.

Control of Taxation and Revenues

Money, taxation, and duties will be key issues that extend far beyond the control of oil export revenues, and again help shape the debates over federalism and central versus local authority.

"Balancing" the Budget, Aid, Debt, and Reparations

Iraq does not need to truly balance its budget, but it needs much better fiscal management. The new government inherits a fiscal mess disguised as an annual budget and plan. It will need to show it can takeover much of the aid process in terms of management and execution, and find ways to distribute it more equitably.

The government will almost certainly have to appeal to the US and the world for another major aid effort at a difficult time, and must follow up on the effort to achieve forgiveness of debt and reparations.

Investment Policy

The same issues that can either polarize or unify Iraqi politics are critical to the climate shaping domestic and foreign investment, and suitable laws and regulations still need to be drafted or confirmed.

Defining the Rule of Law

The constitution leaves many ambiguities, as does actual Iraqi practice to date. The issue is compounded by permeating corruption, inefficiency and delay, and a major debate over the role of religion and Sharia in shaping the rule of law. Striking practical differences in interpretation and enforcement now exist at the local level.

Defining the Practical Nature of Human Rights

Like the rule of law, the constitution leaves as many open areas as it closes. In any case, it is practice, not the letter of the law, that counts. Some issues can be deferred and Iraqi standards are not those of the US and EU.

The basic security of the individual, and human rights as they apply to protection of different ethnic and sectarian groups, are issues that cannot be deferred. Soft ethnic cleansing, enforcement of religious practices, and police and security force abuses are also issues requiring early action.

Defining the Role of religion in the State

Once again, the debate over the constitution almost forces the government to find early solutions and compromises. So does the nature of the political campaign, and Shi'ite and Sunni politics. Inclusive and moderate Islamic solutions will not be a problem. Hard-line efforts, particularly the kind of Shi'ite-dominated efforts like the "555" campaign could be intensely divisive.

Defining the Role of the Coalition and Coalition Forces

Most top Iraqi political figures are aware of how much they need Coalition forces and support. It is clear, however, that this is usually a matter of necessity, not friendship or love. The Iraqi people clearly want the Coalition out; the debate is over. Many new legislators have also campaigned on at least an indirectly anti-Coalition ticket.

The new government will have to come to grips with debates over deadlines for withdrawal, limits on Coalition actions, status of forces agreements, and a host of other issues relating to Coalition forces and influence. It will do so in a largely hostile political environment with new Sunni voices.

Prognosis

This list of problems and issues, and post-election tasks, presents many real challenges. Sunni inclusiveness also remains uncertain. Yet, there are few real deadlines and many areas where muddling through and ambiguity will work or buy time. With good political leadership, finding workable approaches should not be daunting, much less impossible.

Iraqi public opinion polls also indicate that Iraqis will not insist on final solutions, only ask for a good beginning.

There are still serious problems in creating the kind of police forces Iraqis need to defeat the insurgents and provide security. There also have been growing problems with Shi'ite elements in the Ministry of Interior special security units that have treated Sunnis unfairly and may have attacked and killed Sunnis in political and revenge attacks. There is ongoing progress in both areas, however, and the election takes place at a time when significant overall improvements are taking place in Iraqi forces.

As of early December, Iraqi forces already totaled some 214,000 personnel. These included 102,000 in the armed forces under the Ministry of Defense: 101,000 army, some 200 air force, and some 800 navy. They included 112,000 in the police and security forces under the Ministry of Interior: 75,000 police and highway patrol, and 37,000 other MOI forces.

A total of some 130 army and special police battalions, with some 500-800 men each, were fighting in the insurgency. This was 7 battalions more than in late October. A total of 45 were at level 1-3 readiness and "in the lead" in early December. Some 33 battalions were in charge of their own battle space versus only 24 in late October.

The key to success will obviously be pragmatism, inclusiveness, and compromise. As such, it will be far more important for the new government to avoid divisive mistakes than have dramatic successes. Post-election Iraq will be a "close run thing," and everything will depend on the quality of Iraq's new leaders. The odds of success, however, are at least even -- if success is defined as a government that can preserve the core of the nation, reach critical compromise, and move forward in ways that steadily diminish both the insurgency and Shi'ite and Kurdish pressures to divide the nation.

One caution would be that insurgents will have every possible incentive to strike at successful political leaders and a successful political process. Those who believe in ethnic and sectarian division also face a critical six- to eight-month time window in which to push their causes at the expense of efforts at national unity. At least for much of 2006, neither Iraqi political success nor a steadily more effective set of Iraqi forces is likely to put an end to a stream of violent acts of terrorism. Politics will often be brutal and anything but pretty. This, however, is not a sign of failure, and it may well be a sign of success.

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[i] Adapted from Robin Wright, "Bigger Hurdles for US in Iraq's next Phase," Washington Post, December 18, 2005, p. A28.

[ii] Source: ABC News Poll: Where Things Stand, "Poll Finds Broad Optimism in Iraq, But Also Deep Divisions Among Groups," ABC News, December123, 2005.